

The Story of Innovative Banker

**T.A.PAI
&
DOMBIVLI LOCAL**



Introduction by K.K.Pai

**K.G.Mallya
(50th Publication)**



Bank Chairman, T.A.Pai

Religious in Thought, Word & Action T.A.Pai, releasing the Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume in Walkeshwar, of H.H.Shrimat Sudhindra Tirth Swamiji of Shri Kashi Math (L to R) Shri Swamiji, T.A.Pai and Macson A.M.Kamath.



Railway Minister, T.A.Pai

At Katgal, Uttara Kannada District inaugurating Smt. Kamalabai Pikale High School. To his right is Dr.Adike, Vice-Chancellor, Karnataka University and left S.V.Pikale, Advocate Supreme Court, the main force behind the school.

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**K.G.Mallya
(50th Publication)**

**With an Introduction by
K.K.Pai**

**Published on the occasion of the Convention
Of All India Saraswat Cultural Organisation, Mumbai
At Dombivli, on Sunday the 9th Nov., 2003**

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The Story of Innovative Banker, "T.A.Pai & Dombivli Local," a Pen-sketch

By K.G.Mallya
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T.A.Pai

He was great

Yet remained modest

He was powerful

Yet always helpful

He was shrewd

Yet always honest.

He led his men,

Not from the back

But from the front.

Carrying his men

And carrying the danger

He led from the front

And always front.

—The Author

Introduction

When my friend and the author of this book, Shri K.G.Mallya approached me with a request to write an introduction to this book, "The Story of Innovative Banker, T.A.Pai & Dombivli Local" little did I imagine that it is a great volume of multi-dimensions presented in a small form. Historically it is a good document evidencing how a young Bank Manager by sincere and hard work could trigger of economic development of a developing township that is Dombivli in Thana District, bringing together people—commoners to the Central Minister. Yes, I remember. I too had participated as the Chairman and Managing Director of the Bank in his activities of eagerness and anxiety to help the people of Dombivli. After TA.Pai's departure from the Bank, I took over and paid two visits to Dombivli and my second visit was purely an appreciation visit to commend his good work.

This book tells us about the major events during his tenure as a Manager in Dombivli. And through his inimitable style of narration he has painted the beautiful picture of the Bank and the Town in those days. There are many individuals the story but they are all angels. Thus the sailing in very smooth.

I learn that this is his 50th Book, the Golden Jubilee Book, really a golden book in every respect and more so because it is dedicated to the memory of my illustrious predecessor, Late Shri T.A.Pai who had successfully taken the Bank to commendable heights as a great innovative banker of India.

I congratulate Shri Mallya for his splendid achievements not only in the arena of banking but also literature.

K.K.Pai,

Retd. Chairman & Managing Director,
Syndicate Bank

Manipal, 25th October, 2003

Preface

My association with Late Shri T.A.Pai started with my practice as a Tax Advocate. We came closer because the famous surgeon of Mumbai, late Dr.A.V.Baliga was related to both of us. More than taxation T.A.Pai and myself were good personal friends though at times I was tendering advice on legal matters also. In fact we were well wishers of each other and when he became the Railway Minister at the Centre in 1972, his first visit was to Kumta, Karnataka State at my invitation to participate in the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Kanara College Society's Dr.A.V.Baliga College of Arts & Commerce. He paid this visit superseding the one to his native place in Dakshina Kannada District where he was to be felicitated first. When the people there were not happy he declared that Pikale happened to be the son-in-law of Dakshina Kannada and so he deserved the respect first. During his visit he made it a point to offer prayers at the Holy Shrine of Mother Goddess Katyayani at Aversa, and thereafter to Katgal to declare open Smt.Kamalabai Pikale High School in memory of my mother. When he married Vasanti Pai in 1972, as his friend and relative, I had organised a reception in his honour in Shanmukhananda Hall, Mumbai.

I remember with gratitude his help and support in my profession. At his behest I had also an occasion to attend to one of the tax matters of Late Dhirubhai Ambani, the industrial giant of our country. Earlier when I was putting in a lot of efforts for the transition of taxation policy of Goa soon after the liberation, he backed me to the fullest extent. He inaugurated my branch office in Mangalore in 1972 when he was the Rly. Minister with Shri D.Veerendra Heggade, Dharmadhikari of Dharmasthala as the Chief Guest. After advising me to join politics, he had even taken me to Smt.Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister. But I did not pursue as I realised later that politics was not my cup of tea.

Today he is not amidst us to see our progress and achievements but his memory inspires our thoughts and actions especially in the arena of social and community service. Shri K.G.Mallya, a friend of mine deserves full compliments in bringing out this book dedicated to his memory. I congratulate him for his golden work, the 50th publication.

S.V.Pikale, President Emeritus,
All India Saraswat Cultural Organisation (AISCO)&
Senior Advocate,
Supreme Court of India,

Mahim, Mumbai 400 016

25th October 2003

Contents

1. Princess & Elephants
2. Book Release
3. Syndicate Bank
4. Dombivli Local
5. Municipal Water Supply
6. Innovations in Banking
7. My Dear Sir Monthly Letters
8. My team-Cricket Team
9. Farewell To The Chief
10. Dombivli Revisited

Profile

T.A.Pai was born on 17th Jan 1922. His father was Upendra Anant Pai and Mother, Smt.Parvati Amma. In 1943 after getting the B.Com. degree he started banking career with Syndicate Bank as the Deputy Manager and 1944 he was promoted General Manager. In 1962, he became the Managing Director and 1968, the Chairman. He was the Chairman & Managing Director of the Bank till 19.7.1969, the day on which the banks were nationalised. And on nationalisation he was designated as the Custodian. In 1965, he became the Founder Chairman of Food Corporation of India. He held the position honorarily for one year and then returned to the Bank. From 1970 to 1972 he was the Chairman of Life Insurance Corporation of India and in 1972, he became the Railway Minister at the centre. In the same year, he was decorated with the title of Padmabhushan by the Government of India for the meritorious services rendered to the country. Later he held the position of the Minister for Heavy Industries and also Industries and Civil Supplies. In 1980 he retired from active politics. And on 29th May, 1981 he passed away leaving behind his wife, Vasanti Pai and a vast number of friends, relatives admirers, creating a very big void in innovative banking.

The Story of Innovative Banker

1.Princess & Elephants

One may wonder or one may not believe today if it is mentioned that India's top-most industrialist Dhirubhai Ambani of Reliance fame had visited Dombivli and it was T.A.Pai who had brought him to Dombivli. Dr.U.Prabhakar Rao, the eminent surgeon who had the most modern hospital those days played the host. They had visited Dombivli as Chief Guests at the dance programme organised by Dombivli Fine Arts.

In Sixties, Dombivli:

And what was the size of Dombivli those days in the late sixties and early seventies when these two giants visited Dombivli? Population barely 60,000 with four banks of which the latest one was Syndicate Bank and T.A.Pai had visited as the Chairman of that Bank for the first time for declaring the Branch office open on 17th May 1969. Dombivli then was a little sleepy town with small bungalows with gardens in front and at the back. Dombivli East known as Ramnagar had fully developed up to Shivaji Statue near new Municipality building as it stands today and the west, known as Vishnunagar had only a few homes and thatched huts. One could see the grassy fields stretching up to the horizon where the Thane Creek going to Kalyan was looking like a silver line. Then towards Kalyan, again vacant lands and farms in which was grown rice. The Main Road called Manpada Road starting from the Railway Station in the East was virtually without any vehicles plying on the road. On this road, going beyond Shivaji Statue, moving towards Go-grasswadi and passing through the empty land reserved for industrial growth under the auspices of MIDC in those days, in the distance one could see the peaks of Haji Malang Hills looking blue and mysterious with the shrine dedicated to the saint, who it was said, came in the dreams of the pilgrims to fulfil their desires. Once a year during the festival hundreds would travel and climb the hill by foot to secure the saint's blessings and it was well known those days that if you want to get rich quick, go to Haji Malang, stay over night and try your luck to get the saint in your dream. The next best alternative was to work hard in Dombivli, which was an upcoming township under the benevolent grace of the guardian deity of the town, Mangalamurti Lord Ganesh. In Vishnunagar there were two schools, South Indian High School and S.H.Jondhale High School and on the east was Tilak Vidyalaya and also MSP Mandal's High School. There was no college in Dombivli, those days.

Vehicle-less Roads:

Imagine about that Dombivli with no vehicles on the road! The township as a whole had only four to five cars and buses were yet to ply. Autos were zero but in the pollution free residential town were plying the Eco—friendly horse drawn carriages. The Central Railway Local trains were the only means of conveyance linking this part with District Head Quarters Thane, on one side and Kalyan, the Taluka Head Quarters on the other side.

Middle Class People:

As a residential township, Dombivli attracted middle class and lower middle class people, as houses were available on a deposit of Rs.2,500/- and a monthly rent of Rs.50/- Abundant rice and vegetables were available at affordable prices but at nights the armies of mosquitoes would attack mercilessly not allowing any one to have sound sleep.

I had arrived in Dombivli in 1966 in search of a roof over my head and I could get one at Rajaji Path for Rs.3,000/- with a rent of Rs.60/-per month. From here I used to travel to Bombay Fort by 8.45 morning train and the return journey from Bombay depended on the office work which would not be over before 7.30 evening. I was serving for Syndicate Bank, which T.A.Pai headed and this continued up to April, 1969 when I was designated as the Manager of Dombivli Branch of the Bank that was going to be opened soon.

Shelter for Elephants:

K.C.Pai the Deputy General Manager, Premises, who became the General Manager of the Bank later and I, had gone round the town several times by foot, note only within the boundary of the town but also in the nearby localities in search of suitable premises for the Bank. We walked from Shivaji Statue to the distant Famatex or Premier Motors and one name that fascinated most was Gajabandhan Patherli, a village name that is otherwise a part of Dombivli town. Gajabandhan means a place where elephants were kept duly chained up. It was here we were told, that Shivaji Maharaja's royal elephants found a shelter. Kalyan is a harbour town with a recorded history. Boats were sailing up to Kalyan from Arabian Sea. This town, we came to know, got the name Dombivli on account of a tribe called Domb that had resided here long ago.

Lovers of Dombivli:

In fact the first person to fall in love with this little township is none other than K.K.Pai as the General Manager but he visited Dombivli to find out whether the premises were suitable. From Bombay he travelled by car accompanied by N.K.Kamath, Manager of our Fort Branch and on the day of his visit I was

asked to go by train to Bombay and guide them to travel by road via Bhiwandi. Interestingly while passing through Kalyan he asked why that place bore the same name of the birthplace of the saint, Basavanna of Veerashaiva sect. Then he himself told that, that place was known as Basavakalyan but people, for the sake of convenience, called Kalyan. I knew his flair for history.

“My Mother Not So Beautiful”:

And with my limited knowledge about the place during the survey I told him that this Kalyan was under Muslim rule and when Shivaji's troops conquered that township, the rulers fled but the beautiful, young and charming daughter-in-law of the ruler was captured by Shivaji's men and they thought that they could gift the princess to Shivaji and earn his appreciation. When she was brought to his court and presented, the king was overwhelmed by her bewitching beauty. Then to everybody's surprise he joined his palms and exclaimed, “If my mother were to be a beauty like this I would have been more handsome. Mother, please go back to your people. I am sorry for the troubles our people gave you.” With these words he sternly ordered his men to take her back with all safety and honour and leave her at the place where she belonged! “This is the story connected to this place, sir.” I concluded.

But the story of Dombivli continued. Unofficially adopting the Branch, two Chairmen of Syndicate Bank, first T.A.Pai and then K.K.Pai liked the place and people and took great interest in the development of the town through the Branch office of Syndicate Bank.

2. Book Release

As stated earlier while my work-place was Bombay, I made my place of residence in Dombivli, as in those days there were no quarters facility by the Bank, for officers and one had to make his own arrangements. I used to travel everyday by local train from Dombivli to Victoria Terminus and before reaching my office in Bombay Fort, the corner seat of the first class compartment which was less crowded those days was my study room. During the journey that used to take about 1 hour 15 minutes by a slow train and 55 minutes by a fast train, I could read and write and here in the first class compartment, I was living in my own world full of imagination.

Silver Jubilee:

Ours was a small group of like-minded young men dedicated to literature and social service. In 1969, we came to know that H.H.Shrimat Sudhindra Tirth Swamiji of Shri Kashi Math was going to complete 25 years of sanyas deeksha.

We thought of participating in a big way if somebody was to organise any programme but we did not come across with any such move by any organisation. Therefore we thought of embarking on a unique venture of bringing out a colourful commemoration volume in honour of Shri Kashi Math Swamiji.

Editorial Board:

We discussed with our friend A.N.Bhat, a cartoonist and a writer. He not only agreed but also told us that he had a vast collection of rare photographs of Shri Swamiji as his elder brother of Camera House fame was a great admirer of Shri Swamiji's. Then we requested K.P.Mallya a friend of mine to join us and constituted the Editorial Board with A.M.Kamath, an industrialist and social worker popularly known as Macson in Bombay those days as the Chairman of the Board. As the printing was to be undertaken in Manipal Power Press in Manipal, we co-opted P.R.Bhat, Vijayanath Shenoy and S.L.Bhandarkar, all of them being Manipal-based authors to help us in final editing and printing. Being a good donor Macson undertook to bear all the expenses. It was also decided that all copies would be dedicated to Shri Swamiji. As soon as the arrangements were over we worked for almost 6 months. Thus the book, first of its kind if we are permitted to say so modestly, was ready at the end of December 1968.

Rs.100 Crores Silver Jubilee:

In January 1969, Shri Swamiji had arrived in Bombay on his way to Dwarka, on a pilgrimage. The book was ready and we thought we could have it released before Shri Swamiji would leave for Dwarka. However, before we could approach Shri Swamiji about the release, we came to know that at the end of Dec 1968, Syndicate Bank for which I was serving had touched a land mark figures of Rs.100 Crores of Deposits. And simultaneously the Chairman and Managing director, T.A.Pai also had completed 25 years of his banking service. By a strange coincidence he was in Bombay on some office work.

We therefore felt that it would be most appropriate if T.A.Pai would release the book. When we approached he thought for a while and said, "I am here for an urgent official meeting tomorrow. I can spare only two hours in the evening that too from four to six..."

The Magnanimity:

It was the magnanimity of Shri Swamiji to have the programme at the time given by T.A.Pai. Accordingly the programme took place in Walkeshwar Kashi Math the next day T.A.Pai arriving on time. After the release of the commemoration volume titled "The Message" in his address, T.A.Pai stated that more and more young men should be attracted towards institutions like

temples and the youth-they should not turn to God helplessly out of desperation only when they are in difficulties. Offering prayers should be a part of our daily life. To attract the youth towards our temples and associations he suggested that the youth should be empowered and involved in the administration and management.

All India Saraswats:

Then suddenly changing the topic he revealed, “Swamiji, the other day on bank’s work I had been to Punjab and in a meeting I declared, “I am a Saraswat.” After the meeting a sardarji with a turban, beard and sword, came close and fondly hugging me, exclaimed, ‘Today I have found my long lost brother as I am also a Saraswat!’ Then he also stated that all Saraswats once upon a time had lived happily on the banks of the River Saraswati in Punjab some 5000 years ago...’ Earlier I had been to Kashmir where I came to know that the Kashmiri Pandits are also Saraswats. Saraswats are in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal. In the light of all this, I feel we can think of bringing together all Saraswats under one banner and have a reunion to start with.”

Most Beloved Disciples:

In a rare gesture, Shri Swamiji expressing happiness, in his benedictory address complimented T.A.Pai for his participation and the entire Tonse Pai family as the most beloved disciples of the Math.

Very Revealing:

T.A.Pai’s speech was very revealing. All of us were astounded, when we heard him say that there were Saraswats all over the country. All the while we were feeling that ours was a small clan residing in Goa, Uttar Kannada, Dakshina Kannada, Kerala, and in Bombay to some extent. In the audience some people had also thought that the River Saraswati was a small river somewhere in Bengal, like the River Shambhavi in Mulki, Dakshina Kannada! After release of the book, T.A.Pai left. But while taking leave he informed Shri Swamiji that the Bank had reached the deposit figures of Rs.100/-Crores, which the founders had set as a target many years ago. Later we came to know from Macson that T.A.Pai did not stop by giving only a suggestion. He was not an empty-talker, either. He sold the idea to quite a few people but amongst all, S.V. Pikale, a friend of his was enthused to take up the cause. Pikale by then had scaled good heights in his professional career as a Tax Advocate and a Social Worker and T.A.Pai must have felt that he was capable of undertaking the job. And the rest of the story is well known as AISCO & AISF were born in December 1972 and Pikale is continuing as President Emeritus even today.

Swami Vivekananda's Teachings:

We were aware that T.A.Pai was a great follower and devotee of Swami Vivekananda. During one of the Janmashtami festivals he had gifted hundreds of school students Bhagwat Gita and on another occasion he had arranged talks by Vivekanand Squads on importance of higher values in life. To me, he had given this advice: "Devotion should be a continuous process and one must not rush to God only when we are in distress and difficulties and forget Him on other days when we are happy!" He was a great devotee of Lord Ganesh and had a very big and valuable collection of Ganapati idols.

Lord Krishna:

Once he also stated that he would prefer to worship Lord Krishna as the charioteer of Arjun in the Kurukshetra battle-field instead of the flute player of Brindavan. Yes, during the period of my short stay in Udupi during the induction training programme, I could see him as the young General Manager regularly visit Lord Krishna's temple in Udupi driving his black Fiat car, but he, clad in snow white attire.

Youth Power: •

Now if we take out the facets of religious, spiritual or the story of Saraswats from the above function, we can see in a clear light, T.A.Pai's philosophy of utilisation to the maximum extent of the youth power. He asked for the empowerment of the youth reposing tremendous faith in the young men and women of the country. Being a champion of their cause, he chose young men and women to head his Branches in Syndicate Bank and at every forum he was declaring that all his Managers were under the age of 28. Thus the young CEO with his young team of Managers took the young bank to great heights. And this is the success story of a great banker which the authorities recognised in unequivocal terms.

3. Syndicate Bank

This is Syndicate Bank in Mumbai.

This is housed in the bank's own building known as Syndicate Bank Building situated in Sir Phiroze Shah Mehta Road (popularly known as S.P.M.Road) next to City Bank if one enters from Dadabhai Naoroji Road. To its left is Punjab National Bank and in front is United Bank of India.

That way the SPM Road called as the Finance and Banking Street of Mumbai has a good number of banks that are in this street including the Reserve Bank of

India though it faces Shaheed Bhagatsingh Marg.

This Syndicate Bank is a Branch Office of the Bank with its Head Quarters in Manipal, Karnataka State about one thousand Kms away.

Syndicate Bank:

This Bank was started in 1925 by I.Upendra Anant Pai and his brothers. The name in fact was, Canara Industrial & Banking Syndicate Limited which was later renamed as Syndicate Bank, the nickname. Syndicate means a group of people. In this case, the group consisted of middle and lower middle class people.

They started the Bank with a very small capital of Rs.4,000/- as the owners' contribution in the paid up capital of Rs.8,000/- contributed by the other members of the public.

The reason for starting the Bank according to T.A.Pai, was that Upendra Pai did not get a bank loan from a local bank and so he thought of starting his own bank.

Then did he start this Bank for his own benefit? No, never! All that he felt was that small traders and business men like him must be helped by timely finance and should not suffer for want of finance.

This became the philosophy and the working principle of the Bank.

Pigmy Bank:

Dr.T.M.A.Pai, a brother of Upendra Pai, a medical doctor who later became a master builder and a great educationist headed this Bank for a long time and ran it on sound lines. He was known for collecting from the masses their savings of even 0-12 paise a day by sending his men to their doors under his innovative Pigmy Deposit Scheme. It was his philosophy that a country inhabited by poor people can come up only with the savings and that too from the same poor people. The scheme started in 1928 continues even to day when most of the other banks have withdrawn as they did not find it to be cost effective.

Turning Point:

The turning point for this Bank came when T.A.Pai (full name Tonse Anant Pai—Tonse is the name of the village), a young and a brilliant Banker, son of Upendra Pai took over. With a lot of innovative schemes both savings and loans, the Bank galloped and galloped making rapid strides. Under his leadership the Bank was regarded as a model to other banking institutions. Thus it became the small man's big bank and had the largest number of account holders. In the very words of T.A.Pai, one out of 10 Indians banked with his Syndicate Bank.

Fort Branch:

The Bank office in Phiroze Shah Mehta Road called Fort Branch opened its doors on 23rd April, 1937. It was regarded as a very beautiful and model office in every aspect those days as it used to be the office of the Chairman, T.A.Pai also, during business trips to the city.

The Mystical Door:

Close to the main door of the Bank, in the show window on the right hand side as one entered there was a small yellow coloured board on which was written in black as follows:

“SUCH OF THOSE WHO ENTER

THE DOORS OF THIS BANK

WITH A DREAM,

WILL GO BACK

WITH THEIR DREAM

FULLY REALISED.”

And one day, in the sixties, through this door, Dhirubhai Ambani entered Syndicate Bank with his dreams.

Dhirubhai was born on 28th Dec., 1932 and in the year 1949, at a young age of 17, left for Aden after studying up to 10th Standard. In the year 1958, he returned to Bombay to start a business and according to Jayantibhai, a room mate of Dhirubhai in Aden, Jayantibhai's uncle joined hands with Dhirubhai as a partner. He stayed in a small tenement in the business area of Kalbadevi of Mumbai where the textile market of India thrives and throbs. His business bore the name of Reliance Commercial Corporation as an export-import business house with a very modest capital, dealing in spices, textiles and yarn.

Dreams and Ambitions:

By any standards it was a small business. It was like a chicken that had just come out of an egg. As the days passed, with all the constraints like shortage of capital and rented office (in his words “care of telephone”) his ambition, instead of diminishing grew bigger and bigger with the passing of each day. He took the constraints as challenges. But finance posed a big challenge, which could not have been come over easily.

Mode of Finance:

Dhirubhai sought advice from a friend who knew about finance. And he gave advice something like this:

“If you do not have own, then take from friends and relatives because it is always interest free. If that is not forth coming or not sufficient, think of institutional finance like bank’s. Their rates are lower. And if you are an established business house, go to capital market with a share issue. Shares have several advantages. No need to bear and pay periodical interest but you may have to pay a share of your profit by way of dividend. But here also rate of dividend is not fixed. It depends on your profit. But nobody will trouble you if dividend is not paid. But a dividend paying company will have a better credibility than the one that is not paying. If you have plans to expand and if you want to go to the share market again and again, keep a good track record of dividends. But still you need a good bank to service your share issue and payment of dividends. Select a good and friendly bank that will support you in the hour of your need.....”

Now the whole world was before Dhirubhai going round and round like a top which only needed occasional triggers to spin again and again.

The Chief of Syndicate Bank:

And here is the tale, which Dhirubhai himself had narrated to me:

Somebody told Dhirubhai about Syndicate Bank, its liberal loan schemes and above all its Chairman & Managing Director, T.A.Pai who was accessible even to a child. He took a chance. The meeting went off every smoothly. Dhirubhai explained in detail about his dreams, nay, plans and patiently T.A.Pai listened, attentively.

At the end, concluding his monologue Dhirubhai looked up at T.A.Pai’s face eagerly.

“You did not tell me the figure of the loan that you need,” the banker asked.

“I am hesitant,” the prospective borrower told.

“Why,” with a broad smile, T.A.Pai remarked: “ I can see the sparkle in your eyes. You will definitely come up in life. Here is the sanction for Rs.15 lakhs with my very good wishes. But tell me frankly whether or not this is sufficient.”

Dhirubhai was overwhelmed.

Door Always Open:

Yes, the mystical door of Syndicate Bank opened that day for Dhirubhai, did not

close at any point of time and remained open throughout his life. Assured of full financial support for his plans, Dhirubhai went ahead till he made an entry into Dalal Street, the famous route to India's capital market. But it took twelve years for the wheel of fortune to make one turn as for Dhirubhai virtually there was no capital base to start with, except that 'sparkle' in the eyes which only T.A.Pai could notice and nobody else till then. And this is the story of the Number One Industrialist of India.

Entry and Exit through the Door:

I too entered the mystical door of that Branch on 14th November 1965 to work for three years and after working for one year in Mandvi, Bombay in 1969, one day, T.A.Pai called me to his official residence during one of his camps and gave orders to organise the opening of Dombivli Branch as Manager. He thought that I had, by then, become a resident of that place knowing the people and locality very well. He expected a lot by way of business and I did not disappoint in any respect.

4. Dombivli Local

Supreme Court, the apex judiciary body of the country, officially requested banks to devise a scheme to grant loans to the students of the country to enable them to prosecute higher education. Accordingly banks devised a good number of schemes to help the student community. If T.A.Pai, the great innovative banker were alive he would have had a good laugh first and then lamented about the lack of innovative spirit among the bankers to devise schemes that should meet the requirements of the contemporary society. "Should the Judges ask us even to do the things that are expected in the ordinary course?" He would have asked the fellow bankers.

Wrong Estimate:

Now here is an incident that had taken place in the early sixties:

Syndicate Bank, then known as the Canara Industrial & Banking Syndicate Limited had its Head Office in Mukund Nivas Udupi, behind to-day's Municipal buildings. It is a beautiful edifice, worth calling as a heritage building. The Bank's General Manager, T.A.Pai's office was in the second floor. One day, accompanied by a student called Prabhakar, a gentleman called Narahari Kamath dropped in at his office. After exchanging greetings, Kamath revealed, "This boy is from Thirthalli on the Western Ghats. He had come here to seek an admission in the Medical College. He has fulfilled all the conditions and is eligible for an admission."

“If eligible, why did you bring him over here?” T.A.Pai interrupted. “Go and get the admission immediately. I learn only a few seats are available. Please do not waste time.”

“We are not wasting time, but...” Kamath hesitated to reveal further.

“What is that but?” T.A.Pai wanted to know.

Slowly Kamath explained, “Prabhakar is unable to secure the admission for want of money. Not that he cannot afford to pay. While coming from Tirthalli he had brought money but his estimates went wrong. There is a shortage of Rs.3,000/- to meet the requirements. The college authorities say they cannot give credit nor will they wait till he goes back to his place and return with money. Poor boy! Greatly disappointed, he approached me. I thought of troubling you...”

“How can you expect a college to give credit?” T.A.Pai heartily laughed: “Their business is to impart education and mine, to give loans. Tell me exactly what is the required amount to get the admission.”

“Rs.3,000/- sir,” Nervously the aspiring medico opened up his mouth.

“Don’t you worry,” T.A.Pai assured, “down below is our business office. You go and collect Rs.3,000/- Our Manager may ask you to sign some papers. Don’t hesitate. Now let me talk to the Manager over phone.”

Instant Bank Loan:

Within next 15 minutes when the Manager handed over Rs.3,000/-the student’s face beamed with happiness. After securing the admission he went back to his place, brought Rs.3000/- and with interest, closed the loan. The student passed MBBS in Manipal and Masters in Surgery in Bombay and then came to Dombivli to start a full-fledged hospital in the little township that had scant medical facilities in the locality till then.

Great Day:

All this happened much before 1969, the year in which Syndicate Bank started its branch in Dombivli. When T.A.Pai came down to Dombivli to declare the branch open it was a great day for the student who by then had become the famous surgeon, Dr.U.Prabhakar Rao of Dombivli. On that day T.A.Pai, after inaugurating the Bank office found time to pay an appreciation visit to Shrinivas Hospital to have a cup of tea with him. “Shrinivas is my father’s name,” revealed Dr.Rao to T.A.Pai at that time.

Four More Events:

I was the first Branch Manager of Syndicate Bank's new office and held charge of the Branch from 1969 to 1973. During that period in addition to the Branch opening, the following four events took place in Dombivli when T.A.Pai participated, accepting our invitation every time as though Dombivli was his place and we, his near and dear ones.

Second Visit:

In 1969, after seven months of opening the Branch T.A.Pai, again visited Dombivli at my invitation for a daylong programme that included loan disbursement, visits to Small Scale Industrial Estate, High School in the locality and Lockers inauguration in the Branch. For our programmes Dr.Rao was invariably the chief guest as by then, he had become an integral part of our Syndicate family sharing with our joys and our sorrows.

Bank Nationalisation:

I must make a mention of sea changes that had taken place in the arena of banking. When we started in Dombivli, we were in the private sector, shareholders' bank, but on 19th July, 1969, 14 major commercial banks were nationalised by Mrs.Indira Gandhi's Government and our Bank was one among them. Chairman, T.A.Pai was redesignated as the Custodian, to look after the affairs of the nationalised Syndicate Bank by the Government of India. As we understood at that point of time, only the ownership changed but the name, philosophy and all other things remained the same. In T.A.Pai's words, instead of hundreds of shareholders now there was only one strong shareholder, that was the Government of India. We never experienced any change including the outlook after nationalisation.

Third Visit:

After sometime, T.A.Pai had to bid farewell and join Life Insurance Corporation of India as the Chairman. As soon as he joined he improved upon various schemes to popularise LIC bringing in renovation in the arena of Life Insurance, Finance and Investment of the biggest Corporation of India.

At that time Dr.Rao had renovated and expanded his hospital with additional beds and most modern equipments and decided to have the inauguration inviting T.A.Pai as the Chief Guest. T.A.Pai agreed and a grand function took place. However before that function Dombivli Municipality accorded a civic reception to T.A.Pai and K.K.Pai, who succeeded T.A.Pai as Chairman of the Bank. The latter could not attend and so it was in absentia for him.

Fascination for Dombivli:

In reply to the reception, T.A.Pai publicly announced that he had a great love, affection and fascination for Dombivli and for its development he was willing to go to any extent. “ LIC has a lot of good schemes of finance for long periods with softer rates of interest especially for Municipalities and Dombivli could try for Water Supply Scheme,” declared he.

Fire Brigade:

At Shrinivas Hospital it was really a great event as it turned out to be a programme of the township everyone participating. T.A.Pai, a master orator declared, “A hospital is like a fire-brigade. We do not know when the emergency arises and when do we need the services. It should always be alert and ready to serve people round the clock...” Giving such a similes he mesmerised the audience and stole the show not by words alone but by contents bringing in a very meaningful approach to the medical profession itself!

Home-coming:

Interestingly there was no programme of Syndicate Bank that day, but he made it a point to visit our office first, sit for a while going through the figures indicating my progress. As though he was still my Chairman, he patted and appreciated and then took leave before going elsewhere. I could watch him and his feelings, which were just like that of the bride who was returning to mother's for a short stay after her wedding!

With Dhirubhai, Fourth Visit:

T.A.Pai as the Chairman of LIC paid a second visit with Dhirubhai Ambani to preside over a cultural programme in which a young artiste, the daughter of a Reliance employee was to give a dance performance. Dr.Rao played host to both these giants. Not forgetting, T.A.Pai visited my office and sat for a while to quench the thirst and refresh. I placed before him the progress report as if he was still continuing as my Chairman, and he, after going through smiled heartily as if he was still interested in the progress of the Branch and also the place as his own.

Most Memorable Fifth Visit:

The fifth visit, the last one was the most memorable one. He came down for the shifting ceremony of my office to a more spacious and prominent locality and by any count it was a very insignificant programme that did not demand a Central Minister's presence. But he came down accepting my invitation as by then I had a special achievement to report to him. Recognising me as an outstanding

young banker of the locality, Rotary Foundation gave me an award in 1972 to visit US & Canada to study the life in general and banking in particular for eight weeks from 14th April to 14th June, 1972 bearing all the expenses under their Study Exchange Programme.

“Give us a Train, Mr. Railways Minister”:

Well, it was a great programme beyond the words of description. Whole town turned up to receive the Railway Minister as Dombivli railway station was announcing through their public address system every now and then, the Honourable Minister's arrival at the place to declare Syndicate Bank's new office open. Huge crowds, well disciplined not only in the office but down on the roads also were waiting for the arrival of the Minister to catch a glimpse. The programme went off very well beyond our expectations. As was usual with us, Dr. Rao was one of the Chief Guests. His address was very brief. All that he said or requested was, “Sir, you are a very kindhearted person known for your magnanimity. You never disappoint anyone. People of Dombivli do not have any means of conveyance other than the Railway Train. But they are always overcrowded. Give us a train, Dombivli Local that would start from here to mitigate the problem at least to some extent, during the office hours. Please oblige.” The audience clapped in appreciation. In fact our programme was held on 20th August 1972 and earlier on 29th July 1972 there was a peaceful bunch of Dombivli, demanding for a local train to start from Dombivli.

Loans instead of Train:

The Honourable Railway Minister at once swung into action. Instantly he called his Secretary who was all the while waiting behind him with a file to his side and whispered something. He also whispered in reply which none of us heard, as there was a prolonged applause. However he made some notes on the file he was carrying. Moments ticked by. We waited with bated breath for the announcement by the Minister. T.A. Pai slowly stood up smiling as though he would declare the sanction of Dombivli Local then and there itself! But it did not happen that way. He said, “I am glad that Mr. K.G. Mallya with his team mates is rendering yeoman service to this township. On his behalf I reassure everyone in Dombivli that the Bank will grant loans on liberal terms in all deserving cases. Good luck to him and all the members of the staff in the new premises.” However, while concluding, he smiled meaningfully at Dr. Rao!

Appreciation:

Programme over, T.A. Pai left. Before leaving, placing his hand affectionately on my right shoulder and congratulating me, he said, “Well done, keep up! But

remember my assurance to people about loans.” Acknowledging sincerely, I promised, “Sir, I know your mission in life is to help the poor and the needy. I shall never disappoint when you have honoured by coming down all the way from Delhi to bless me. Can I not reciprocate in a humble way, that too as a part of my official duty?” Smiling brightly he took leave etching an everlasting impression on my heart, which I felt, was more valuable than 100 promotions in the Bank!

Bank & Railways:

Next day quite a few persons congratulated me for having arranged a visit of the Railway Minister to Dombivli. Some of them even asked when could they expect Dombivli Local, thinking that before taking leave, the Minister must have told me privately about it. Thanking all of them I said, “The Honourable Minister has directed me to grant loans on liberal terms. Railways are a different administration with their own style of functioning and decision making. Let us not expect that it would be as fast as depositing and withdrawing money from the bank within a few minutes.” Heart of heart I was glad that T.A.Pai never made any empty promise which normally was the case with other politicians and ministers who wantonly promise bridges where there were no rivers! He acted as a shrewd banker who never promises a loan without looking into the merits of the case.

Bank's Forum:

But did T.A.Pai ignore Dr.Rao's appeal for the train when he liked and loved him like a member of his family? As it looks now at that moment of time, he was unable to take an 'on the spot decision' because there were no executives from the Railways in our midst and it was purely Syndicate Bank's programme. However the Minister did take some action. A few days later, quite a few fast trains that were not halting earlier at Dombivli started halting during peak hours to accommodate the commuters and Dombivli Local became a reality later. But by then I had left Dombivli on a transfer as a part of my service conditions. Yet, according to me, the bulk of the credit of bringing an exclusive local train to Dombivli should go to Dr.U.Prabhakar Rao, who had officially initiated the process that day. By any count it is his Dombivli Local, Dr.Rao's!

5. Municipal Water Supply

Railway Minister, T.A.Pai's pronouncement of liberal finance by our Bank in Dombivli was put to litmus test before long. The story is as follows:

The Chief Officer of Dombivli Municipal Council with his men, one day hurriedly

entered my cabin. I stood up and received them.

“Mallya sab,” he said, “we are in thick soup. You must come to our rescue at any cost.”

“Tell me, what the matter is,” I thought of reducing the stress and offered, “Before that shall we have tea?” He silently nodded his head in assent. I called my attendant to fetch tea.

No Balance in the Account:

“Now tell me, please!” I encouraged the Chief to reveal. He explained, “You know, our Municipality does not have its own water supply arrangement. We buy water from MIDC and pay their monthly bill by a cheque. The cheque has to be handed over as soon as the bill comes whether there is a balance in the account or not. The balance depends on the collection we receive by way Octroi and property tax. This month’s collections are very poor and virtually there is no balance in the account after paying the salary. Without money we have issued the cheque and when it is presented we are afraid we may not able to meet it.” He looked up at my face haplessly.

Shortfall:

By then, tea came. I asked them to take tea first as though that would give us stimulation to take a decision fast though knowing fully well that I did not have any solution if there was no balance to meet. Still I wanted to know what would be the ultimate shortfall as it may take two to three days for the cheque to be presented for payment. Rs.2,50,000/- was the reply. “What is the balance now?” I enquired. The Accounts officer said it was barely Rs,25,000/-

Grim Situation:

“So in the worst circumstances you may need a short term finance of Rs.2.25 lakhs”.

“Yes,” the Chief said meekly, “but we are trying our best to collect arrears of property tax. Ultimately we may need your help to the extent of Rs. One lakh according to our estimates. Please help us. Otherwise the MIDC will stop supplying water. Once they cut off the supply, it may require two days to restore and in the meantime, the entire town will not get water for two days...” I pondered over the matter. It was a very grim situation and I was aware that even if the shortfall were to be only Rs.5/-, I was unable to help them as the Council did not have any power to borrow from any source and they had to meet their expenses by collecting the funds due to them. Then my powers of sanctioning credit was barely Rs.5,000/-

Only a Smile:

After a few moments of deadly silence I raised my head and smiled at the Chief indicating my helplessness as my tongue did not form or roll out that precious word, "Sorry!" Taking my smile as a favourable indication of sanction or help, the Chief Officer thanked and left happily.

Help Sought:

I thought of apprising the situation to my Head Office and seek their guidance as Municipal Council happened to be one of our prestigious account holders. There was no STD facility those days and so I booked a lightning call and contacted my immediate boss Divisional Manager Credit. After hearing fully he cautioned me not to venture finance to an entity that did not have powers to borrow. But I pleaded, "Sir, this is a question of water supply to the whole town. Once the supply is stopped there will be an agitation and other law and order problems. More than that even I will not get water for two days. The Municipality believes that we will work out the ways to bail them. I do not want to disappoint them."

Hearty Laugh:

"But I will not be able to protect you, if something goes wrong," he again cautioned and surprisingly, later, I was wonderstruck at my own words. I told this much to my boss: "Don't you worry, sir. I will honour their cheque borrowing power or no power. Even I do not have that much of sanctioning powers. After all it is Municipality. Can it vanish in the thin air like other borrowers who will sometimes leave us high and dry?"

The D.M. did not get angry. On the contrary he had a hearty laugh.

Thus that day passed off peacefully.

No Debit Balance:

Next day every five minutes people from Municipality brought money and credited and on the third day morning the devil called cheque was before me nay, on my table, as if staring ironically at me with his eyes wide open! The ultimate shortage was Rs.43,000/- and I did not have the sanctioning powers even to that extent.

And my power was my boldness to face the eventuality if any. "We shall keep the cheque pending till the business closes. If the Municipality is unable to bring in till then, we shall honour the cheque by allowing a debit balance." Like this, I instructed my officials. But, before the Bank closed for the day the Municipality brought in Rs.50,000/- and thus, ultimately the cheque was honoured without any debit balance at all.

Home I went that day lighthearted. God had saved my grace.

Morale Booster:

Next day a beaming Chief Officer came to thank me.

“Why?” said I, “I never did any favour to you. You worked hard and avoided the debit.”

“No sir,” he acknowledged, “if at all you had said a single word, ‘No!’ that day, we would have gone back as a frustrated lot and would not have tried at all to collect this much of money on a war footing. Your willingness to help, made us work hard as we knew very well that you too have your own limitations and yet you wanted to go out of the way to help us. Thanks again.” He rose to go. Not allowing to go, I offered, “Be seated, sir. Let us have tea.”

“This time it is my turn to offer. Please visit my office and we shall have together.” With these words the Chief left.

Introspection:

After he had gone, I sat for a while for introspection. What emboldened me to take the decision to finance the Municipality in spite of the technical hitches and my D.M.’s advice not to finance? I thought for a while and the answer was at hand: I was under the spell of T.A.Pai’s unusual quality of helping people in difficulties. And his spell continued throughout my service though at times it put me to difficulties also.

6. Innovations in Banking

Many of the innovations introduced by T.A.Pai in Syndicate Bank began in 1958, the year in which I joined the Bank as a clerk, after my initial training at Udupi. He initiated the Bank’s expansion programme as he had also brought in many innovations in the administration of the Bank. The Bank’s staff college was started in the same year and so also “Giant”, the house magazine, to act as a powerful means of two-way communication. The Syndicate could boast of these when many bigger banks did not have them.

Innovative Bank:

I became Manager almost after a decade of service in various branches. I was asked to head the proposed branch in Dombivli, a small township on the outskirts of Mumbai. But during the decade, I could see our Bank grow from size to size primarily as an innovative bank under the leadership of T.A.Pai, who had by then become the Chairman and Managing Director. The Bank with one innovative

scheme or the other, was hitting the headlines of newspapers almost every alternative day. The Bank started in Sheshadripuram in Bangalore the first ever all ladies branch in the whole world, in which all the members of the staff, Agent to Attender were ladies. It was really a very successful experiment by T.A.Pai. In his words, “It attracted more lady clients than men!” Similar branches were opened later in other metropolitan centers like New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad and Mysore.

On another occasion the Bank opened on one single day, 20 Branches in different parts of the country! “Tell us how did you manage to get safe room doors, furniture and above all, the Managers and the staff”, this was how other bankers enquired with T.A.Pai. Then, the Bank started agricultural finance, which no commercial bank in those days dared to think of even in a dream! Financing the common man was one of the main objectives of the founding fathers of the Bank, but T.A.Pai saw to it that this objective was followed in letter and spirit.

Deposit Schemes:

For encouraging the small savers to invest their savings safely and without much strain, T.A.Pai introduced many deposit schemes with innovative features. One of them was Cash Certificates with quarterly compounded interest facility for the benefit of children called Children Welfare Certificates to mature after 20 years. Retirement Benefit Certificate, again with a long period for the benefit of people who wanted to provide for the life after retirement. His most popular product was the deposit scheme under which payment of interest was made possible at monthly or quarterly rests. In a country where no social security scheme by the state was available, he brought in this scheme called Social Security Deposit Scheme which was never heard of in the arena of banking as the banks in those days used to pay interest on a half-yearly basis. Even in respect of Recurring Deposits he linked it to Housing Loan Scheme or Medical Loan Scheme wherein the depositor could get as a loan equal to twice the amount of the balance standing to the credit of the account. Then instead of diaries and calendars for the New Year, once he chose to distribute seeds of flowers and vegetables in beautiful packets so that all can make use of them in their gardens. His spirit of innovation seemed inexhaustible which I could notice from close quarters when I became the Manager. He used to call us, the Managers as “My Trusted Lieutenants” and he did mean literally so, not only by words but by his actions also as stated elsewhere in this book.

Business Potentials:

When I became Manager of the Bank’s new Branch in Dombivli I had invited him to inaugurate the Branch, which he gladly accepted. The opening ceremony

took place in May 1969. To Dombivli, the most popular mode of transportation was the local train. Travel by road was time-consuming and people never travelled by road. But my Chairman T.A.Pai wanted to come by car. As there was no one who knew the route he had asked me to accompany him. On the way I casually referred that Dombivli was a small township with a population of around 60,000 and there were already three banks with total deposits of around Rs 50 lakhs and the advances, Rs 4 lakhs. All the while he was reclining to the seat in the car in a relaxed manner but when I told the figures suddenly he became alert and anxiously asked, "What are the advances figures?"

"Four lakhs, Sir", I rejoined.

"Are you sure?" in a louder tone he asked.

"Yes, Sir. These are the figures given by the Reserve Bank."

Reclining back he said, "Then you must start the business in a reverse gear. Grant loans and make use of credit as a tool for mobilising resources."

"Yes, Sir," I said as obediently as I could. This was his message for the new Manager. I took his advice in the right spirit.

As we entered the township, he saw the dismal condition of the roads. Instantly he instructed, "Ask the Municipality whether they need finance to repair these roads." I was wonder-struck. The branch was yet to open its doors for business. And my Chairman had seen all potentials for the new branch before declaring it open!

"Yes, sir!" I agreed like a school student.

Personal Visits:

After reaching, he declared the Branch open and after visiting a few of the dignitaries in their respective places by walking down the streets of the town in a rare gesture, he returned, wishing success to the Branch in general and me in particular.

But we were not a success. On the first day, the deposits were barely Rs. 23,000/- When we reached Rs. 1 lakh, I telephoned to him and he was very happy as though it were one crore. "Keep up!" he said in all sincerity. All that I could notice was his good support to the Managers by word and action and on no occasion he belittled any Manager for any reason.

Ladies Savings Week:

T.A.Pai announced resources mobilisation focussing on different sections of the society. As a part of that the Branches were asked to organise a ladies

savings week. Taking the assistance of lady staff members my branch decided to have on the first day a formal programme of inauguration of the week inviting prominent personalities, of course ladies, to address the ladies in the locality. The invitation cards were printed and I took care to send the first card to T.A.Pai asking for his message to be read out at the function. My friend D.S.Nayak in the Head office took personally to T.A.Pai and as reported to me by him, the very sight of the card made T.A.Pai jubilant as never did he think that his call would be responded positively with a lightning speed. His message came and it was read out to an audience of more than 250 ladies. It was an experience by itself. The ladies discussed about the need to curtail expenses and save for the rainy day however small the family income be. It was virtually a symposium in a beautiful shamiana erected in front of the Branch. When the full report with the photos reached the Chief, he was overwhelmed, I was told.

Crores of Walking Banks:

Why ladies? On the day of opening of my Branch T.A.Pai was invited to address a women's organisation in Dombivli. And this was how he began the address:

“When I was in Europe, they asked me how many banks are there in India. I told that we have more than 24 crores of walking banks. To me our ladies are our banks. When an important official of the World Bank had asked the same question during a discussion, I told that the total amount of gold that we have in this country is much larger than the deposits in the Fort Knox in the United States. Gaping at me he asked, “What do you mean?” “It is well distributed among the women of the country and no security charges are levied at all and they are taking good care of it. Our ladies are our walking banks and the ornaments they wear are our savings and reserves. Should there be an occasion, they will definitely come forward and lend a helping hand. Our ladies are known for handing over the ornaments when there is a financial crisis in the family.” So according to T.A.Pai, our ladies are our banks and the jewels they wear are our savings and hidden reserves.

Luring Tiny Tots:

T.A.Pai played Pied Piper of Hamelin luring all the tiny tots of the country when he announced the Children's Savings Week much earlier to Ladies Savings. This happened when I was working as Assistant Manager in Sagar, Shimoga District from 1962 to 1965. To open the account, the minimum initial contribution in the case of general public was Rs.5/- but in the case of children he declared that it would be Rs.4/- and the balance of Re 1/- would come by way of a gift from the Bank during the week. Colourful pass books were issued during the week and any one who had crossed the age of 12 could open and run the account in his

own name. The only requirement was that the student should bring in an introduction from the principal of the school. Invitations were sent out to the schools in the locality and all schools responded favourably by sending their students for a visit to the Bank to make the students aware of the deposit schemes and also the loans for higher education or to start self-employment. The student community wondered at the sight of huge Current Account Ledgers, bulky DayBook in which the Bank maintained its own records and the long keys of the safe and safe room. In those days there were no gadgets or personal computers and in my office at Sagar, we kept at a prominent place the manually operated desk calculator to show the students how calculations could be made mechanically within a fraction of a second. They wondered whether there could exist such a machine at all. Every newspaper carried the success story of luring the country's tiny tots to teach the virtue of savings while they were young and yet to start earning their own.

Common Man, Uncommon Facility:

“No Man is too small for a bank account” was the slogan adopted by T.A.Pai. He called all the Managers of Bombay branches one morning and said, “I want each one of you to grant 1000 small loans before December.” When others doubted about the feasibility, I stood up and said, “Sir, I shall do it. If not thousand at least 500!” He was very happy. Within a week's time H.N.Kamath, the Chief of the Bank's Public Relations from Head Office lands at Dombivli ready to render any assistance, as directed by T.A.Pai. We sat together and worked out a scheme. Dombivli did not have good roads and so there was no public transportation system either. The industrial area was almost 3 kms. away from the railway station and the workers used to walk down the distance morning and evening. We thought of financing the factory workers to buy bicycles costing Rs. 200 each. The repayment would be Rs.11 per month – Rs 10 towards principal and Re.1/- towards interest. In the present day terminology the EMI was Rs. 11. On a single day 510 bicycle loans were granted and the loanees took out a procession in the entire town. T.A.Pai present on the occasion, was overjoyed. The Hero Bicycle Company deputed its sales manager to witness the miracle and also to propagate if possible in other parts of the country. The Bank's Balance Sheet of 1969 carried the photo of the Chairman with the Branch Manager with five hundred and ten bicycles lined up in the background!

Not Bicycles Alone:

While granting 510 bicycle loan we never lost sight of self-employment to the poor and the destitute. Loans for 25 sewing machines were also given so that the poor could earn a living by taking up tailoring in their own homes. The experience in respect of recoveries was really rewarding. It must be noted that

in those days there were no Government sponsored anti-poverty loan schemes and we took the initiative ourselves drawing inspiration from T.A.Pai.

Other side of the Story:

All were happy with the cycle loans, but not the bank's auditors. Going through 510 loan documents seemed very cumbersome and they commented that loans were sanctioned like a co-operative credit society. We never bothered about any comments as almost all loans were regularly repaid as we had tied up repayment with the employers. At the end, all were closed except 9 loans with a total balance of around Rs.1,000/- The bank wrote it off without questioning as the image and the publicity created outweighed far in excess of this small amount of bad debt. And K.K.Pai was the Chairman at that time who continued with the spirit of innovation in the Bank which was really a great source of inspiration and strength for persons like me.

Financing Roads:

When the boss himself was innovative, we too were tempted to be innovative in our approach. I had taken T.A.Pai's advice of financing the Municipality very seriously. I approached the Chief Officer and offered help. He was very happy but said that the Municipality did not have borrowing powers. Yet we worked out a scheme whereby we financed the road contractors against their receivables from the Municipality by registering power of attorney in our favour. Thus Dombivli got good motorable roads. But by then T.A.Pai had already left Syndicate Bank to take up bigger assignments of Government of India.

Practical Approach:

The most fascinating aspect of his innovative banking was that the approach was highly practical and appealing. Study loans for example: To be repaid after getting the job, interest rebate for prompt repayment etc., no one could think of in those days. It may be recalled that Syndicate Bank was the only bank that was granting such loans for a long time and interestingly a few years ago, the Supreme Court had to give directions to the banks to grant study loans on liberal terms to the aspiring students! Even at the cost of repetition, we reiterate that if T.A.Pai were alive, what would have been his reaction? On one occasion, he had lamented, "How Bharatmata who had given birth to millions of people has suddenly become barren and could not produce a single banker with ingenuity!" Then what about the self-employed people who want to start their own? He used to tell us, "If no cash is available to bring in as margin, do not insist on that. Instead take his educational qualification and experience itself as a safety margin." In the case of new enterprises, he used to advise, "To the promoter, provide by way of a soft loan, the means for maintenance during the period of

gestation. We cannot expect him to starve and organize the things.” No project report contains this provision. And while appraising credit proposals we used to bear this aspect in mind.

Visits to Dombivli:

I had participated every time by implementing whole-heartedly whenever he had given a call in respect of something new and innovative. No doubt, therefore he used to visit Dombivli whenever I had sent an invitation. Even after he had left Syndicate Bank to head the LIC as its Chairman or the Central Government as a Cabinet Minister he did visit Dombivli and honoured by accepting the invitation. And these acts of kindness, now I firmly believe, were definitely in appreciation of my participation in his endeavours in treading on a new path by way of innovative banking. Otherwise why should the Honourable Railway Minister, T.A.Pai, accepting my invitation come down all the way to Dombivli for the shifting ceremony of office premises of a very insignificant branch of the bank? Now after thirty years, as I write these lines, everything looks like a fairy tale.

7. My Dear Sir Monthly Letters

From the Branch to the Head Office we were submitting various periodical reports and returns but T.A.Pai wanted the Branch Managers to write to him on the 1st day of every month a simple personal letter giving him the figures of 1.Deposits, 2.Advances, 3.New Business Canvassed, 4.Utilisation of Sanctioning Powers both Loans and Revenue Expenses, 5.Staff Position—adequate or inadequate, 6.Important Events in the Branch during the previous month and at the end 7.Problems if any. These letters began with the courtesy title, My Dear Sir and I used to call them as My Dear Sir letters.

Immediate Action:

Once I had brought to his notice that I had exhausted all the powers of sanction under Loans thinking that he might not read but within a week's time he sent me an official letter vesting again additional powers equivalent to the previous ones.

No Provision:

Although there was no clause or provision in the letter, on another occasion I wrote about a personal problem and he officially solved it. On a different occasion, I extended an invitation to visit my branch through this letter creating a new head, “Any Other Matter” but he accepted the invitation. Thus before long I came to know that they were not ordinary letters but were acting as bridges between the top boss and the man in the field cementing and binding the relations

to more cordiality. It was a one-page letter that had carried our stories of success and accounts of failure or messages of our joys and tidings of our sorrows directly to his heart. And the patience with which he was responding with a note of optimism or a positive gesture was really remarkable.

This, No Boss:

It was everybody's experience. When hearts were heavy, laden with problem, official or domestic, personal or impersonal, real or imaginary, a personal letter or a brief talk was sufficient to make the heart lighter. In fact all of us had leaned heavily on his generosity and good nature and that had made us feel like orphans when he had left the bank. Perhaps no top boss of any institution has ever maintained such a cordial relationship with the members of staff and the "any time accessibility for anybody" must have been the secret of his success.

Catholic Outlook:

The following are the excerpts of his farewell speech before taking over as the Chairman of LIC of India:

"In the South Kanara District once upon a time there were Banks that identified themselves with certain communities. But the Syndicate Bank has never been attached to any particular community and it has been a cosmopolitan organisation. I always consider of you who worked with me are my friends and relatives. The moment you stepped into this organisation all of you become my relatives and I have always been eager to help each one of you. I sought the welfare of the organisation through the welfare of my employees!"

In the year 1965, there was an employees' strike in the Bank and quite a few employees were dismissed from service. And 'Sudha,' a leading Kannada Weekly from Bangalore while paying glorious tributes to T.A.Pai had gone on record as follows:

"The employees fought till the end and lost and became hapless. Shri Pai won the case yet he could not forget the difficulties of the employees and their innocent families. He individually lifted up and gave them jobs. Those who were defeated had won and Shri Pai too won. But he won their hearts..."

Thus during the 26 years service to his Bank he gave opportunities to all to come up and created valuable assets, the reliable employees who could rise to any positions of responsibilities, the human assets and in his words, the assets not reflected in the Balance Sheet of the Bank.

Mishap in Dombivli:

A mishap occurred in our Dombivli Branch. An agent of the Bank, Vittal Naik by name who was collecting small savings under the Pigmy Scheme of the Bank received severe injuries in his left hand while keeping the big glass bottle over the water cooler. Dr.Prabhakar Rao operated and the operation was successful. However, when the question of payment of hospital bill came, as he was not an employee, technically the Bank could not pay ! During the next visit of T.A.Pai the bill was placed before him explaining the difficulties. As usual he smiled, sanctioned and stated, “Do you know why there are rules and regulations? In the normal course they are to be literally followed and in abnormal circumstances they have to be bypassed. That is the basic theory of management...” As his student, I smiled and accepted.

Programme for LIC:

He had left the Bank and took charge of L.I.C on 2nd March 1970. On 7th March I had a chance to listen to him as the Chairman of LIC. This was his policy address charting a new course for the gigantic corporation of the country: “The LIC is a vast ocean of resources that will be utilised for common good. Claims will be settled promptly, policyholders will get prompt attention, the policyholder will be considered as the king and the Corporation will make giant strides in the rural area, rural housing, rural sanitation and many plans to increase the longevity. If my policy holders die young I am put to a loss because I have to settle the claim and I will not get the steady stream of premia thereby losing the resources...” I was marvelled at the practical approach.

Benevolence, an Asset:

Well, a word about the noble quality of benevolence. T.A.Pai must have made this as the unwritten Management Philosophy and Human Resources Policy as his successor, K.K.Pai who was known for his strict and disciplined administration pursued the same policy of benevolence, with a commendable effectiveness. Normally when the charge of an institution is handed over by the outgoing Chief Executive to the incoming one, he has to hand over lock, stock and barrel that means all assets and liabilities have to be properly accounted and handed over. As a student of Management Science I never knew that the outgoing boss T.A.Pai could hand over the quality of benevolence to his successor retaining the same amount to take it with him elsewhere! In my case at least, I saw the continuity in this way:

Rare Case:

In the year 1971, when I was the Manager of Dombivli Branch a circular from

Head Office came informing that during that year as an austerity measure there would not be any promotions. I was due for promotion to the Senior Officer Grade (equivalent to the present Scale III) that year and by any standard my promotion could not have been rejected. Therefore I wrote a letter to K.K.Pai, CMD that it was my misfortune that my promotion was due that year. Surprisingly within a week's time I received instructions by telex from the Head Office that I must proceed to Manipal immediately to appear before an Interview Committee to consider my Promotion!

Tough Interview:

I appeared before the Committee consisting of H.N.Pai, General Manager, H.N.Rao, Chief Accountant, and K.S.Kamath, Chief Inspector – the top brass of the Bank. It was almost half an hour that I had to face these stalwarts and at the end H.N.Rao with a smile said that they wanted to know my depth and extract from me more by way of knowledge! In fact they had asked more than 100 questions! And it is pertinent to remember the last question by H.N.Pai, the lion among the bankers, "Given the preference which Branch of the Bank would you like to head?" Knowing fully well that he was in charge of Bombay Fort branch long ago, I instantly replied, "Bombay Fort Branch, Sir!"

"Why?"

"I want to prove my capabilities by successfully handling the biggest branch of the Bank!"

He nodded his head with a smile.

Yes, in the year 1988, I was posted to that Branch as Assistant General Manager (Scale V) after 17 years and by then it had lost its No.1 position and thus I had lost the Paradise for ever.

Out of the Way:

Thereafter I called on the CMD who asked how the interview was. I replied, "Great!" and took leave. Exactly after a week to my great surprise, the orders of my promotion came and this was totally beyond my comprehension as the Bank had already announced that there were no promotions. K.K.Pai, the CMD had gone out of the way and had made an exception simply basing on my letter – very unusual in any administration.

Well, a fortnight later K.K.Pai was in Bombay. I thought of paying respects to him personally and also express my gratitude.

Sole Promotee:

Yes, I could meet him. As soon as the door of the cabin was opened, he caught sight of me and stood up. Before I could say, “Good Morning, sir” he affectionately outstretched his right arm, shook my hands gaily and said, “Hearty congratulations – You are the sole promotee this year!” I knew not what to say or do. I stood like a statue. He asked me to be seated for a cup of tea. After tea I took leave with a sense of pride, honour, humility and above all great responsibility. I did not disappoint him for the unique honour conferred on me.

Study Leave:

Within the next three months I received an Award from the Rotary International to visit the USA and Canada as an outstanding banker and at that time he was one person who was really overjoyed at my achievement. And here again I sought his help to secure study leave with salary during my visit abroad. He never said, “No!” and proved that benevolence had no boundaries.

And “My Dear Sir Monthly Letters” continued even during the regime of K.K.Pai also and only after he had retired, the system of writing letters was discontinued de-linking the Branches from the Head Office and making them report to Zonal Management.

Those were the days of the Golden Era in Syndicate Bank!

8. My Team - Cricket Team

In all fairness, this chapter should have found the pride of place at the beginning of this book as the Manager alone cannot run a bank office, which is purely a service industry.

Traditional Duties:

Traditionally the function of the Manager includes planning, organising, staffing, directing and supervising and controlling so that the workforce will contribute its best in realising the goals set. He has to primarily provide the necessary leadership whenever there is a need. “That management is the best management which manages the least,” so goes a saying in management science. This is not so simple as it looks. The administration should prepare the people in such a way that they would manage themselves with the least supervision. I think Syndicate Bank worked efficiently with this as the philosophy.

Clock with Hands:

In another approach, the Manager's position is compared to the outwardly visible dial and two hands of the clock while the staff is compared to the invisible mechanism inside the clock that makes the hands work.

My Fortune:

Whatever be the approach, I was fortunate in having a very good team in Dombivli was putting in the best to make the branch a grand success under my leadership.

My Team:

Although I do not remember the names of all members of the staff now, I have not forgotten the names of my trusted lieutenants, Sub-Manager, K.R. Shetty, Assistant Manager, P.V.Kamath and Special Assistant, P.R.Nayak and my first day team mates: N.L.Prabhu, Ramdas Shenoy, Sudhakar Shenoy, J.N.Singh, lady staff members Rathi Poonacha, Suman Kalwari, Saroja Hanumattekar and attendants—Vittaldas, Surendra and Felix. It was indeed a good team, which any one should be proud of as all were faithful and friendly ready to carry out any instructions or were willing to work hard to any extent under any circumstances.

Four Banks:

Before the arrival of Syndicate Bank in Dombivli there were three banks, Canara, Bank of Maharashtra and United Western and ours was the fourth one. Of them Canara Bank had the maximum business and was very popular too.

Cricket Team:

One day Sub-Manager Shetty entered my cabin with the Assistant Manager Kamath with an unusual proposal not relating to business or in any way to the arena of banking. They said, the local Canara Bank had invited us for a festival cricket match and they had accepted the invitation. I was aware that Shetty happened to be an all rounder, and if I am not mistaken, a Varsity player. If at all he had a proper encouragement and opening certainly he would have shone at Ranji Trophy, if not Test Cricket. So I said, "Please go ahead. But I will not be able to play."

Shetty said, "We will not go ahead without you. We want you to be our Captain!"

Cricket Captain:

"Me, Captain?" astounded I stood up: "Shetty will be the captain and I will note the runs sitting in the pavilion. It is ages since I played cricket."

But both of them insisted, “Sir, be with us on the play ground. We shall give you such a place where no ball will reach and you need not change your place even during the change of overs. We need your presence not in the pavilion but in the battlefield. “Now tell me, if we exclude the lady staff members and the people on leave do we have the full eleven?” enquired I. “Leave that worry to us, sir.” Shetty was confident: “We shall bring two or three good players from our Bombay Branches to make our eleven.”

Their Team:

I had tremendous confidence in Shetty as I knew that the Canara Bank Dombivli had a full-fledged team with the Manager as the Captain who was a seasoned cricketer. I had led the cricket teams during the school days but all that was old glory. After pondering over, I agreed, as I did not wish to displease my people. They started practising during spare time and I did not participate in any one of the practice sessions also relying on their placement in the safe area of the ground while fielding!

Shocks Came:

On the previous day of our ‘test match’ when we were bent upon beating Canara Bank at least in cricket if not in banking, two shocks came to us. Canara Bank sports secretary visited our office to verify our attendance register whether our eleven consisted of Branch Staff only. They found the extra names and requested us to delete. With that the outsiders were excluded and our eleven became eight. Then our boys went to Canara Bank and their team was from the Branch only. “Was this not discussed when the invitation for a match came?” I innocently asked and our people had no answer. Then the second shock was more severe. Shetty had a bruise in one of the fingers while practising and he had a little bandage! “Can you hold the ball?” Anxiously I enquired. He said there should not be any problem!

Match Played:

Both the teams met each other on the ground. After usual greetings there was a toss and the game started. At this point of time, I don’t remember who batted first. But, I remember, I had scored four runs one, one and two. In spite of the bruise, Shetty could hold the bat and score well. Over my four runs, none was displeased on our side. During our fielding, Shetty had given me a good placement near a tree where I could stand in the shadow, if required. As expected no ball came to me. But I could watch the game very clearly. As the time passed, the Canara Bank Captain seemed invincible. Shetty struggled hard with his bruised finger but the batsman seemed enjoying the bowling. I could not bear the sight.

When there was a change of over, from the shade I walked up to Shetty and asked, "Give me the ball. I want to try at bowling." Obediently he gave the ball without any reservation.

Golden Team:

I started bowling. The first ball went in one direction and the second one in another direction. The seasoned Canara Bank Captain smiled and when I bowled the third ball it went straight to the wickets, as if there was no batsman to play and lo, to everybody's amazement he was clean bowled! The crowd applauded, Shetty came to congratulate with a warm handshake with that finger in bandage and Kamath, the happiest among all came running and hugging me, complimented, "Sir, you have taken the most precious and prized wicket." With that we won the match. But what prompted me to do all this? My trusted teammates, as in the Bank had arranged for everything including my comforts on the ground and asked me to play. How lucky a person should have been to lead such a golden team!

Jai Jawan:

During Bangla Desh War my team became a team of hard core patriots. We collected contributions for the National Defence Fund, brought out a book, "Jai Jawan" praising our armed forces and invited our Chairman & Managing Director, K.K.Pai so that we could hand over the collection made by us. He gladly visited and applauded our efforts.

Time to Take Leave:

On 10th July 1973 I handed over the charge of the Branch on a transfer to Mandvi Branch. My opening day figures were Rs.23,000/- and on the day of my handing over it was beyond Rs.50.00 lakhs and Loans Rs.20 lakhs as against Deposits of Rs.50.00 lakhs and Loans of Rs.4 lakhs for the township of Dombivli as a whole while we opened the branch. The most impressive figures were the total number of accounts exceeding 6000. And the loans: We had financed from students to starting a college, organising fine arts programmes to manufacturing fine chemicals and bicycles to heavy duty trucks. In fact we had financed all productive endeavours including pea-nut sellers and vegetable vendors on the roadside at 4% interest. "Want a loan, go to Syndicate Bank," was on the tip of everybody's tongue in Dombivli.

Thus while leaving Dombivli, I carried goodwill of the people and good wishes of the members of my team. What more does a person need in life?

9. Farewell To The Chief

T.A.Pai had to bid us fare well to take up the assignment as the Chairman of L.I.C. of India and on 7th March, 1970 the Employees Union had organised an At Home to him in the Bristol Grill Hotel in the Phiroze Shah Mehta Road, Fort Mumbai. They had invited the Branch Managers also for the programme and so, I had attended coming down from Dombivli.

Comrade H.R.Shenoy (comrade is the word used by trade unionists while addressing each other) read out the welcome address. Then followed the addresses by comrade office bearers and at the end, after T.A.Pai's address there was light refreshment. We, the Managers were the distinguished guests at the programme occupying the seats in the front row. While taking snacks, I heard T.A.Pai making a request to Shenoy asking for a copy of the welcome address. Even I wanted a copy for my personal records and I too went up to the dais and asked Shenoy. Till then, little did Shenoy realise that his speech was an epoch making one appreciating the quality of the leadership of the management of the Bank. Those were the days when the Xerox copies were unheard of and so he regretted that he had not taken even a single copy to be handed over to the Chief Guest. However, he agreed to have them cyclostyled and sent to all besides handing over personally one copy to T.A.Pai. And here it is reproduced word by word:

Our honoured guest, Shri T.A.Pai, Com. Prabhatkar, Com President and comrades,

It is indeed a great pleasure and honour to have this opportunity to have you, Sir, amongst us. I am sure all present will join me in according you a very hearty welcome.

Many of us present recall another occasion, when at this very place, we met to felicitate you on your assumption of office as Chairman of the Food Corporation of India. This time we have met to felicitate you on your assumption of office as Chairman of Life Insurance Corporation of India.

First of all we welcome the fact that you will continue to be connected with the world of finance. As workers in the Banking industry we naturally have close and friendly ties with the workers of Insurance Industry. Thus our loss is, we are sure, a gain to our brother workers of the Insurance Industry.

It is almost two decades since the formation of our union. The Syndicate Bank, which was known as Canara Industrial & Banking Syndicate, was founded in 1925, i.e. 45 years ago. If one looks back however, it will be seen that it is during the last 25 years that the Bank has grown from a Pigmy to a 'Giant'. If we say

so, the bulk of the credit goes to Shri T.A.Pai for such rapid growth and progress.

To his credit goes many “Firsts” in the Banking Industry as such. In fact many of the schemes and programmes now being undertaken by the Nationalised Banks were already undertaken several years ago by Shri T.A.Pai.

Long ago our Union recognised the fact that Shri T.A.Pai could not be classified among the agents of monopoly bank lords, and have therefore never hesitated to support all the schemes, which led to the progress to the nation. This support and cooperation was also essential for the growth and development of the Bank. There were times when there were differences and even serious differences. But these never aroused doubts about each other’s bonafides.

In the Banking Industry Shri T.A.Pai was the first to accept the Code of Discipline in Industry without any amendments and recognised our Union. There has been no turning back since. From a ‘C’ Class Bank with nearly 3 crores of working funds, Shri T.A.Pai has helped to achieve the formidable heights of an ‘A’ class bank in the region of 150 crores, ranking among the first 10 in both the private and public sectors.

Shri T.A.Pai leaves us with a big heritage and tradition of achievements. We can assure him that this will be remembered and nourished by all of us. Shri T.A.Pai goes to Life Insurance of Corporation of India with a backlog of great achievements and we are sure that he will prove to be a great success in that field. He goes with all our good wishes, because his human approach in Industrial relations, has been the source of successful industrial relations.

Once more on behalf of our Union, all of us present and on behalf of myself, I wish you, Sir, the very best and all success in your new venture.”

Parting Message:

T.A.Pai as the Custodian of the Bank wrote to every one of us on 20-2-1970 and the excerpts are as follows:

Farewell my dear friends. I have to take my leave of all of you with deepest regret in my heart to take over the new assignment, which Government of India wants me to take as a national responsibility.

I must express my heartfelt thanks to everyone of you for the tremendous support that you have given to me all these years in realising our dreams and I want you to see that this is continued to your next leader in the same measure. I have no doubt that with him you will march to greater glory and make all the dreams of our first Chairman, Dr.T.M.A.Pai of building up a powerful institution as an instrument of public good. Each of you will be responsible by your action

in creating opportunities and a way of life which we are enjoying, for as many people as possible in this country, and each of you will realise that you owe a duty to the country which means its millions.

Wherever I am, you can always count upon my goodwill and support and very best wishes. The good of all of you shall always be in my thought and I wish you all the best of luck. God be with you—T.A.Pai.

And relying on the promise in the concluding paragraph of the letter, I had invited him for the shifting ceremony of Dombivli Branch and he did keep his words.

The message as a whole gave the outpourings of his heart and also the story of the institution that he had caressed and nourished for 26 long years as his showpiece and his laboratory, as well.

His Contribution:

T.A.Pai's was a unique personality. It was second to none. His dedication and devotion and sacrifice and spirit of service are beyond comparison. Banking, Public Relations and Bank Management whatever be the arena of activity he was a pioneer and also a leader with a new approach. Even advertisement material for marketing the banking products was conceived and prepared by him. And regardless of the position one held, everyone was enthused by him to contribute his best for the growth and success of the Bank.

Super Model:

T.A.Pai was a great source of inspiration to all of us and we had taken him as a role model. But he proved to be a super role model and quite a few of the dimensions of his personality, at least I could not imbibe and follow even though he had given me similar treatment on many occasions. Let me recount the following incident: He used to call the Managers as his trusted lieutenants as stated by me else where and it was tested more than once by me. In Dombivli we had a good credit proposal for starting a paper mill with the locally available waste and rags as the raw material. The amount was substantial. K.G.Shenoy, our Industrial Finance Manager studied the proposal and prepared an office note recommending the proposal and as the Branch Manager, I too recommended for favourable consideration. But the prospective borrower wanted an immediate sanction or at least the commitment to sanction. We came to know that T.A.Pai was in Bombay on some office work and thought of meeting him with the proposal for getting the sanction. As usual he greeted with a smile and asked what the matter was. He was orally briefed and the note containing 10 pages was placed before him.

“Did you study the case carefully?” He enquired with the Industrial Finance Manager. “Yes, sir,” was the reply. Then turning to me he asked, “Are you satisfied?” “Yes, sir,” I said confidently. With that he turned 9 pages mechanically and on the 10th page gave the sanction in principle. We returned saluting him. I do not think that any executive would sign any papers simply relying on the words of his sub-ordinates and this was his style of functioning, which I could never copy or follow. May be because I was occupying a lower position with several authorities to question my action or may be because I was not knowing the Managers intimately as he did from the day one.

Farewell to the Chief:

Well, with the backdrop of incidents and personal experience of this nature, we bade farewell to T.A.Pai with a heavy heart. It was a grand programme organised in the N.K.E.S.High School in Wadala Mumbai on a bright Sunday morning. Padmashree Dr.T.M.A.Pai, the erstwhile Chairman of the Bank presided. Dr. Pai had a good tradition of keeping the garland in his neck till the end of the programme but in this programme, making a deviation, halfway through his speech he emotionally took out the garland of jasmine and put on to T.A.Pai as his benedictory blessings. He also stated that for the Pais of Manipal insurance was not a new field as he himself had started Canara Mutual Assurance Company, which was nationalised by the Government of India. He added that in all such cases his position was that of a father who would marry and give away his daughter as a bride. But to LIC he had not only gifted his daughter that was an insurance company but today, figuratively, his son as the Chairman. Incidentally T.A.Pai was his nephew and not son.

Signature Campaign:

It looked as though T.A.Pai was on a signature campaign that day in the afternoon while we had assembled for a dinner in his honour at Bristol Grill Fort, Bombay. He was visibly moved, as the moment of departure was coming closer and closer. After concluding his address, he took out from his pocket the printed address that was presented in the morning and requested all to put signature wherever space was permitting. Would he be able to recognise our signatures at a later date, thought I, when I marked mine. And at moment of time itself, it was crammed with signatures beyond identification. More than one hundred signatures on a foolscap paper on which the address was printed, presented an unusually curious picture of human love, affection, respect, esteem and sentimental attachment to the leader of their heart. This address, embellished with signatures of all present, was a really a rare roll of honour to a great innovative banker of our times.

His Gesture:

I have to conclude this chapter with one more observation. We did not give any gifts or mementos during any one of his Dombivli programmes nor did he have the slightest expectation. So was the case with K. K. Pai. T. A. Pai was decorated with Honorary Doctorates by a couple of Universities and also Padmabhushan by the Government of India for his meritorious service to the nation. But he remained only T.A.Pai till the end, without adding any titles to his name.

Welcome to the New Chief:

We had organised a welcome to the new Chairman K.K.Pai when T.A.Pai presided. Thus the link continued with the same warmth and human touch. And perhaps this is best the way to take care of the change of guard.

10. Dombivli Revisited

I was born in 1939 in Kinnigoli, Mangalore Taluk, Dakshina Kannada District of the present Karnataka State. I lost my father at the age of four and my widowed mother brought me up giving me high school education with great difficulty as there was no one to look after financial side of our family. She did not know even to sign her name. Yet she thought that I should be given good education. I studied in Pompeii High School, Talipadi, Aikla.

Church School:

The school belonged to Roman Catholic Church and our Head Master was Rev.Father B.A.D'Souza, the parish priest of Kirem Church. He did two good things for the student community. He taught Shakespeare's English taking English classes himself and then, when the Catholic Students were taken as a separate batch for teaching their own religion under Moral Studies, Hindus were taken as a different group and taught our scriptures through a vedic pundit, K.A.Udupa, Editor Yugapurusha, who taught us Hindi and Kannada in the School. All other classes for all communities were common and as young minds we never thought that Christians and Hindus were different from each others'. Thus secularism or the personal religion was taught to us from the very beginning of our life.

Madras SSLC Board:

Those days were the days when there were only a few High Schools in the District and all of them were affiliated to Madras S.S.L.C. Board as the District itself was in the Madras Presidency. T.A.Pai was a member of the Board. When I appeared for the SSLC Examination 1957, our school was designated

for the first time as a centre for the Examination and earlier all had to go to Mulki for that examination. In the newly opened centre, I stood first scoring and beating all the previous records of the school. Mine was a very fit case for pursuing higher studies but the precarious financial position of the family prevented me from going to the college. Instead I thought of searching for a good clerical job and so I joined Stenography class to learn Typewriting and Shorthand in Kinnigoli itself under the leadership of the Principal, K.N.Mallya who was kind enough to grant me 50% concèssion in the fees considering my weak financial position.

Father's Noble Deeds:

Almost eight months had gone by and within next two months I was to appear for the examination of Typing and Shorthand. One day evening, however, a messenger from Venkatraya Shenoy, President of our temple in Kinnigoli sent a message that I should see him immediately. I called on him anxiously. With all cordiality he said, “Ganesh, your fortunes have opened up perhaps on account of noble deeds of your father, Devaraya Mallya in service of this town and her people. Without expecting anything in return he had wiped out every tear and we do not have the account of his donations and financial help and assistance to the poor people. Yes, now fruits of his benevolent deeds are before you.”

I was tongue tied at the introduction of the subject itself. Without revealing the purpose, he had summoned me and now he was praising my father who had left for his heavenly abode about 15 years ago. I did not ask nor did I speak a word and waited for him to reveal.

T.A.Pai's Visit:

Then he continued to say: “ You know today T.A.Pai, General Manager of Syndicate Bank was here. He paid a visit to your school and asked who stood first in the recent SSLC. The padre gave your name and told T.A.Pai that he is your kinsman. As we were going round the school he asked me to find out from you whether you would be interested in joining his Bank! You are really lucky, I say. I too have recommended your name.” Then he waited for my reply. I did not react immediately and stated, “ I shall consult my mother and my principal of typing institute.”

Positive Response:

“What is there to consult?” He sharply reacted. “When a great person like T.A.Pai himself is asking, take this to be a rare honour. There are about 50 boys from your school who have passed Board Examination. He never offered the job to others. It is only for you.” Still I thought I should consult my mother and

elders. I took permission to give reply the next day. There was a positive response from every one. So I went with my application to Shenoy. He prepared a covering letter and said, "This is a small service from me to your father, who did so much for this Kinnigoli. A great soul, I do not know when we can see a second Devaraya Mallya."

"You will see in me!" Silently thought I and returned.

Syndicate Bank Staff College:

Thus the doors of the Bank were wide open to me. I underwent the induction programme of 2 months in the staff college. The college had just started and I was marvelled at the keen interest taken by the General Manager T.A.Pai who not only addressed us on the first day of the training but also visited us almost every week to assess the progress. It appeared he was monitoring the progress himself and suggesting midcourse corrections. It was a group of 15 trainees but he took us to be model clerks if not show pieces. During the 61st Birthday Celebrations of Dr.Madhav Pai's, the then Chairman & Managing Director, we were taken to the Head Office to attend the programme as special invitees. When there was a Managers' Conference of the Bank, he brought all the Managers to the college to show what course was offered to us. At that time each one of us was surrounded by two to three Managers and they asked us a good number of searching questions.

Man Power Development:

Even during the breakup social, though it was small group, insignificant by any count, the GM, CMD and Supdt. Of Branches, T.A.Pai, Dr.Madhav Pai and K.K.Pai respectively, were present. At every step and every minute, T.A.Pai saw to it that we were treated as important persons and that he had expected a lot from us. The good treatment that we were given was worth emulating by anyone who is searching for an exemplary man power development programme. According to me, it starts with the foundation course itself.

In the Field:

I was posted to Hubli Branch of the Bank and I joined on 10th June 1958. I was the youngest in the team of 14 members (19 years) and one may wonder if I say now that I was wearing half pant, like a student till one day, my Manager N.B.Haribal advised me to wear a lungi instead! Those were the days when the Bank itself was very small, 90 Branches with about Rs.10 Crore deposits. I worked hard without watching clock and a calendar and it may look incredible to-day if I make a mention that there were occasions when we used to work nightlong keeping ourselves awake by sipping strong tea every now and then

and at day break, go to our room and have cold water bath so that we would not get sleep during the daytime when the office was ready for business!

Onward to Bombay:

I passed CAIIB Part I and according to the policy of the Bank I was promoted as a Junior Officer Scale I immediately, T.A.Pai himself signing congratulatory and promotion orders. Thus the youngest member of the staff got the promotion first. After three years I passed CAIIB Part II while I was in Sagar, Shimoga District after spending a year in Shirva, my home district and there I got promotion to the next higher grade, Assistant Senior Officer, Scale II but was posted to Bombay Fort branch to join immediately. And the rest of the story started from Dombivli.

Career Further:

Two important things took place in Dombivli. I was not a graduate till then and I became a Commerce Graduate of Poona University as an External Student, appearing privately. Then I went abroad under Rotary Foundation Award. After coming back I made it a point to meet my mentor and master T.A.Pai with a U.N.Peace Medal which I had purchased as a souvenir, from U.N.Headquarters, while in New York. He gladly accepted and asked, "How was the trip?"

I said, "I should not have visited those countries at all. I have come back with a cartload of knowledge in Banking and Management Science. But I do not know whether I will be able to utilise that knowledge here." He noticed my disappointment and frustration. "Are you still in Dombivli?" he enquired. "Where else can I go, sir?" I rejoined.

No Wholesale Reforms:

He was not in the Bank at that time nor with LIC. He was tipped for a position in Indira Gandhi's cabinet and was waiting for her orders, having resigned from the LIC. He told seriously. "Don't think that your knowledge will go waste. Don't think of reforming the whole world, either. Knowledge is power. In your work place, with your people around you and in your assignment, kindly make use of it. The experience would be rewarding. Best of luck!" That was T.A.Pai my first master in banking. He had changed my outlook and this did not happen in United States and Canada but in Bombay, India. He gave me a small tip that shone like a precious little diamond set in a heavy ring made of gold! When I took his leave, my outlook was completely changed and when I returned to my seat, that of the Bank Manager I was a different person, a different Manager altogether. In Dombivli, I was Scale III in the hierarchy of the bank administration and when I retired in 1997 at the age of 58 according to the Rules of the Bank,

I was in the Scale VI, that of the Deputy General Manager, an important position in the top management grade. If I have to declare honestly it was first T.A.Pai and then his successor K.K.Pai, who had led me there.

Great Honour:

The visit abroad had opened up my vision to see opportunities in our own country. My American hosts suggested that I must strengthen my educational and professional qualifications as, in US they will go in for Masters in their respective fields. So I did my M.Com. with Banking from Poona University and simultaneously passed AIB(London) with least difficulty. There was a reward for this achievement. Indian Institute of Bankers who conduct professional Diploma Examinations, CAIIB, invited me to act as one of the Chief Examiners for their Part II Banking Examination. The task was to set question papers, prepare model answers and moderate the evaluations done by of Examiners attached to me, the Chief Examiner. It was really a great honour at the national level.

Branch Opening:

I retired from the services of Syndicate Bank and settled down in Mumbai. Sadanand D. Nayak, Chairman R.S.Co-op.Bank, a friend of mine one day informed that they would be opening a branch office of the Bank in Dombivli and I must attend the opening ceremony. I gladly agreed as it would provide me an opportunity to visit Dombivli which I learnt had grown many folds now. From 60,000 population it has now crossed 10 lakhs and I learn, this city is regarded as the biggest in Asia belonging to middle class families consisting of office goers both husband and wife, with graduation as minimum qualification. There was one more reason: Dr.U.Prabhakar Rao my wellwisher was one of the Chief Guests at the opening ceremony.

Dr.Rao's Address:

With all eagerness and enthusiasm I attended the programme on Sunday the 4th May, 2003. On the dais Dr.Rao was seated among the prominent co-operative bankers. After everyone addressed about banking and NPAs it was his turn to speak. All that he expressed was, "All the speakers spoke about banking and most of the technicalities are totally strange to me. I am no banker. I know only this much: Banking means Syndicate Bank headed by the Manager Mr.K.G.Mallya. I am glad that he is here in the audience. I wish this bank a grand success in Dombivli." I was honoured at the reference he made, that too after thirty years. I wanted to thank him as soon as the programme was over. But the crowd was so big that I could not meet him at all.

At Railway Station:

Programme over, I went to the Railway Station to catch the train for the return journey. There was some time for the train to arrive. I sat on a seat on the platform waiting for the train. Dr.Rao had brought me back Dombivli of my days as Bank Manager. Before my mind's eye, I could see the sign-boards of Shrinivas Hospital, Dombivli Municipal Council, Syndicate Bank and everything there carrying the pictures of T.A.Pai with a broad and gracious smile. I recalled with happiness the joy I had while pacing up and down the concrete roads and also those five hundred ten bicycles pedalled by the factory workers both financed by Syndicate Bank. And to our misfortune T.A.Pai is not alive to day to see this present day bustling Dombivli which he had loved and caressed with all his heart as his place.

Who Brought Me To Dombivli?

Who brought me to Dombivli, I recalled. After my wedding, I was posted to Bombay Fort Branch by the Bank from Sagar, Shimoga District on a transfer and in those days the Bank could not provide me with a place to reside. My brother-in-law, Sheshagiri Pandit accommodated me in his small tenement in Kurla for one year. The Bank could not grant even a loan to acquire a room in a chawl as in those days there was no scheme of staff loans including housing loans. Therefore my brother-in-law had to come to my rescue again by giving me a loan of Rs.3,000/- to acquire a tenement in Dombivli, the place very far from my work place. I was to leave in the early morning and reach late at night. As the life seemed a difficult one, I approached T.A.Pai with a request to transfer me back to Karnataka. He listened to my tale of woes patiently and instead of a transfer, sanctioned a loan of Rs.3000/- going out of the way. At that time, I never imagined that he would make me Manager in Dombivli and mitigate my hardships of commuting long distances everyday when there were no fixed hours of working for the management staff.

Dombivli Local:

By then, the Bombay bound train came and I boarded. When I took the seat, again through my mind's eye I could see many more scenes from the past but one scene reigned supreme, that was of Dr.Rao at our shifting ceremony appealing to the Railway Minister to sanction Dombivli Local!

Inaugural Run:

During those days I used to write articles, stories and poems while travelling by train from Dombivli. And to day my mind thought of conceiving a story, the story of Dombivli Local and now I could paint a picture of the inaugural run of

Dombivli Local bound to Victoria Terminus now renamed as Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. The train is bearing the name of Dr. Prabhakar Rao and above the driver's cabin is a flag fluttering, with T.A.Pai's name! Dr.Rao is sitting in the driver's cabin on a decorated high seat next to the driver's with a big garland of red roses around his neck and in his hand is a bouquet again of red roses, both offered by his Syndicate Bank in token of their love and appreciation. The guard whistled and to the accompaniment of the playing of the band by the children of a nearby school to mark the great event, the gaily decorated train slowly left the colourful platform of Dombivli Railway Station with hundreds in attendance, joyfully waving their hands. The train moved slowly as if to acknowledge the greetings of the commuters, but soon gained momentum and sped away.

For a person like me who had started the career with a zero, Dombivli local will always be a source of inspiration.



L.I.C. Chairman, T.A. Pai

**T.A. Pai at Shrinivas Hospital Inauguration: (L to R)
Dr. Prabhakar Rao, T.A. Pai and behind him is K.G. Mallya.**

About This Book

This is my 50th book, the Golden Jubilee Publication taking into account my books and publications in three languages, Konkani, Kannada and English and in English, this is the 27th one.

My first book is an English Novel, "The Goddess of Wealth" dedicated to T.A.Pai and the introduction was from K.K.Pai. In the introduction he decorated me with the title of the "First English Novelist of Dakshina Kannada District." Both T.A.Pai and K.K.Pai were my masters, first T.A.Pai and then K.K.Pai who not only taught me banking but also the way of life especially the rare qualities of honesty and hard-work even under changing times marked by changes in value systems.

T.A.Pai is a legend. A very honest and innovative banker who proved that the sky is the limit for innovation. Banking is a very dynamic world surrounded by a lot of regulations and one will always like to play safe by complying with the law and the rules of the regulating authorities. But compliance of the law alone is not everything. If we need the law for the health and welfare of the system and the society, requirements of the contemporary society are also equally important especially when banking and finance has a constructive and positive role to play. Innovation has to be tried by a forward looking civilisation and think tanks in banks must work hard in this respect both for the success and survival of the banking system. According to me, this is the central theme and the main message of the life of T.A.Pai.

During my service, with my hobbies of journalism and literature, I had documented many important events by writing articles soon after the events took place and now they have come very handy while compiling this book. I have covered the period of my tenure as Manager of Dombivli Branch from 1969 to 1973 and I think this was the best period in the life of T.A.Pai also.

There are already many books on T.A.Pai and mine will be one more candle in the row lit in memory of the departed soul. But I am sure this little candle will add more glow to the great personality that was T.A.Pai.

--K.G.MALLYA,